

Re: Need help choosing a novel to read

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.lang.japan/2005-01/0562.html>

From: necoandjeff (*spam_at_schrepfer.com*)

Date: 01/14/05

Date: Fri, 14 Jan 2005 05:32:41 GMT

Kevin Gowen wrote:

> *necoandjeff* wrote:

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>>>>> *necoandjeff* wrote:

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>>>>>> *Kevin Gowen* wrote:

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>>>>>>> *Gavin Steyn* wrote:

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>>>>>>>

>>>>>>>> *Since teaching myself Japanese*

>>>>>>>>

>>>>>>>> *No, you aren't.*

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>>>>>>>>> *As a fellow dokukgakuer, I wonder if you might clarify what you*

>>>>>>>>> *mean here Kevin.*

>>>>>>>>>

>>>>>>>>>> *You've never had any guidance whatsoever?*

>>>>>>>>>>

>>>>>>>>>>

>>>>>>>>>>> *From a teacher? No, not until I had already been studying for 4*

>>>>>>>>>>> *years and was conversational. Even my girlfriend back then didn't*

>>>>>>>>>>> *really give me guidance so much as act as a sounding board for*

>>>>>>>>>>> *things I figured out on my own. I learned most of my Japanese early*

>>>>>>>>>>> *on from dictionaries, trudging through books word for word, and*

>>>>>>>>>>> *television dramas, as well as listening in on conversations among*

>>>>>>>>>>> *Japanese. The only real guidance I had was for one year at Nagoya*

>>>> *University, but that was after 4 years of studying on my own and
>>>> getting to the point that I was able to pass the test and get the
>>>> monbusho scholarship. By then I was already approaching JPL2
>>>> ability.*
>>>
>>> *By "guidance" I don't necessarily mean an instructor. No one ever
>>> taught me English.*
>>
>>
>> *No one ever taught you English? Well perhaps that is why you are
>> having trouble with what English speakers commonly mean when they
>> say self-taught. By your definition, I think it is safe to say the
>> only person in the world who is self-taught in a language is L.L.
>> Zamenhof, being self-taught in Esperanto.*
>
> *Well, Tolkien surely taught himself Quenya. When I think of
> "self-taught", I think of Srinivasa Ramanujan.*
>
> > *Do you suppose that is how "self-taught" is commonly understood,
>> Kevin?*
>
> *As you may have figured out by now, I don't spend much time
> speculating about how this or that is commonly understood. Too ad
> numerum for me. Besides, what good is being common? I didn't get
> where I am today by aiming for the median.*

Normally, not a bad strategy. But language is all about communication and you can't be an effective communicator by ignoring the commonly understood meaning of words and phrases. (Que for Kevin to once again bring up the non-sequitor about redefining marriage...)

>> *If you learned in a classroom under the guidance of a teacher, you
>> are not self-taught. If you learned by yourself using reference
>> books, dictionaries, texts, etc., outside of the formal classroom
>> setting you are self-taught. Does anyone else have trouble with this
>> concept?*
>
> *I understand perfectly well that is your notion. I just disagree that
> you did it all by yourself.*

Being self-taught in a language doesn't mean "complete isolation from guidance." I studied for two years before even being exposed to a live Japanese speaker (my girlfriend.) But even after I met her, she was access to resources (like music, some dictionaries, etc.) and someone to practice on. But she never really taught me Japanese. You have to understand this was mid to late 80s in Northern Kentucky. I was lucky to find a World War II era Tuttle textbook at the local B. Dalton. In fact I learned some pretty bizarre words early on (like chukuonki) because of the limited materials I had to work with. My first exposure to writing was that orange Tuttle kanji reference book that I actually came across in a bookstore somewhere. I had no idea what the hell it all meant at first, and nobody was there to explain

it to me. I didn't understand the difference between hiragana, katakana and kanji at all. I even thought the single kanji were actually individual vocabulary words that meant the one word English words that appeared with each one. It was a total disaster. But through slow trial and error and analyzing Japanese texts, and reconciling it all back to that little romaji World War II era textbook, I eventually got the basic gist of it. Believe me I wish someone had been there to explain it to me. I would have saved myself a lot of trouble.

- > *You benefited from interaction with native*
- > *speakers and immersion in a Japanese environment.*

Of course. I don't think these things are at all inconsistent with what people mean when they say "self taught."

- > *No one made you sit*
- > *in a chair and hand in homework, but you certainly didn't teach*
- > *yourself.*

Yes, as a matter of fact, I did teach myself. In fact, I made myself sit in a chair and spend hours and hours flipping through hand made flash cards to learn kanji, once I figured out what they were all about.

Jeff